

COALFIELDS REGENERATION ***in North East England***

The contribution of Faith Communities

A report by
Fiona Clarke

Contents

	Page
Context and Background	2
The Government's Coalfields Agenda	3
The response of the Churches in the North East to the former coalmining areas	
Reflecting on progress and planning for the future	4
A joint approach to regional concerns	
Regional evaluation and information gathering events	
Valuing contributions at all levels and striving for an inclusive approach	5
Venues in former coalfield areas	
Preface to findings and analysis of data collected	
Thinking about neighbourhood renewal and regeneration from a theological perspective	
Key Findings – views from the workshops	8
Policy issues and evaluating effectiveness	10
Resources and Action Plans	11
Findings from the Questionnaire Survey	13
Conclusions	16
Priorities for the Churches	17
Recommendations for Stakeholders	20
Initial Framework for Development of Action Plan	23
Appendices	
Appendix 1 Speakers at 12 October Workshop, Ashington	24
Appendix 2 Speakers at 19 October Workshop, Washington	26
Appendix 3 Lynemouth Development Trust	28
Appendix 4 The Racecourse Community Access Point	29
Appendix 5 Shilbottle Skills Centre	30
Appendix 6 South Tyneside Training and Employment Network	31
Acknowledgements	32

COALFIELDS REGENERATION in North East England

.....the contribution of Faith Communities

Context and Background...

The North East of England has been hit hard by the closure of its coalmining industry over the past 15 years. Despite efforts at economic diversification, the counties of Northumberland and Durham had relied heavily on that industry for over 300 years. Its rapid disappearance resulted in high concentrations of unemployment and a negative impact on a whole way of life.

Life in coalmining areas generated a high degree of social cohesion, resilience and mutual support. As well as the strong work ethic and spirit of teamwork, much of the social, recreation and welfare facilities in each community were provided through the place of work.

As a result of the closure of mines, and the demise of these social and cultural resources, some people have experienced isolation and feelings of living at the margins - in some cases experiencing social exclusion as a consequence of the economic and social changes.

The demise of mining left the area with a legacy of problems, including environmental damage and poor health resulting from adverse working conditions. A further characteristic of the North East as a whole, but coalfield areas in particular, is a culture where business entrepreneurship and formal educational qualifications had never been highly valued. Research shows that both public and private services in many areas

have been under-resourced, to the extent that they often fail to alleviate the poor quality of life.

The period of decline also left a degenerating physical infrastructure, including inadequate transport networks and low quality housing. Many pit villages are small, relatively isolated, and surrounded by poor rural areas. The problems and issues have been compounded in the past year as a result of foot and mouth disease and its resulting impact on tourism.

Some of the newer industries that were attracted to the region to help diversify its economy, have themselves retreated in the face of global economic conditions.

In the North East, as confidence in economic prospects has waned, there has been a gradual loss of population from the region. Understandably, young ambitious people leave the North East to follow better job prospects.

All of these factors have left the former coalfield areas failing to advance and match the growing prosperity of some parts of the UK. The coalfield areas of the North East make up some of the most deprived and disadvantaged communities as recent Government reports and indices of deprivation illustrate.

The North East is not alone having experienced a rapidly declining

coal industry; this has affected other regions of Britain, and Europe. However, there is evidence that many of the areas in

Europe have planned and diversified their regional economies more strategically than was possible in the UK.

The Government's Coalfields Agenda

In response to the concerns over the former mining areas, the new government in 1997 set up the Coalfields Task Force to address the concerns. The task force published its report "Making the Difference" in 1998, setting out the scale of the problems and an action plan for their solution. One of the outcomes was the establishment of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust to help channel Government funds to initiatives within former coalmining communities.

The Coalfields Regeneration Trust and its team of regional officers have raised the profile of the respective coalfield areas. This has resulted in much greater recognition of the distinctive problems of the former coalfields and more resources have been directed to their regeneration and recovery. The areas have commanded higher priority in regeneration funding and partnerships between agencies and

local communities have been created to tackle identified issues. However, although some progress has been made it would be misleading to assert or claim that the difficulties are now 'in hand' and on the way towards resolution.

While there seems to be a genuine will by decision-makers to tackle the problems, there is still much work to be undertaken within the villages and towns of the North East. The modernisation of their public services, the rediscovery of their economic and social purpose, and the restoration of the morale of communities (often beset by changes beyond their control) are all matters needing attention.

Indeed, the high number of companies operating in the North East controlled by Boards external to the UK makes the region's economy more fragile than any other area in the UK.

The response of the Churches in the North East to the former coalmining areas

As this report will illustrate the churches and faith communities have a long and continuing tradition of playing a significant role in the former mining areas.

In recognition of the distinctive contribution of the faith

communities, The Coalfields Regeneration Trust has worked with the Church Urban Fund to help initiate and pump-prime projects and community development activities over the past three years.

Reflecting on progress and planning for the future....

The key question being asked by the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and the Church Urban Fund was ***'how much progress has been made by the churches and faith communities in addressing the coalfield issues and concerns?'***

The Government's recent announcement of continuing support for the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, leading to the prospect of further resources for faith communities to develop and continue work in the priority coalfield areas, was a dimension which sharpened the focus on the above question.

A joint approach to regional concerns.

In the North East the Churches' Regional Commission has the task of bringing churches together and enabling them to act collectively in response to regional issues and concerns.

The Churches' Regional Commission in the North East, with the support of the Church Urban Fund agreed to organise and facilitate information gathering workshop type events in each of the Newcastle and Durham Diocese areas. To supplement the events, a postal questionnaire survey of priority coalfield parishes was included as part of a wider information gathering process.

The findings and analysis of the information gathered in the events and from the questionnaires is the substance of this publication and report. The report draws from the analysis some recommendations

for the respective stakeholders, particularly those with a strategic planning and management role in the North East region.

Regional evaluation and information gathering events

The Events were organised late in the Autumn of 2001. The following summarises the aims and purposes of the events as expressed in the invitation letters to parishes and congregational groups, in the priority coalfield areas designated by the Coalfield Regeneration Trust [Listed in Appendices]

Aims and Purposes....

- To undertake an audit of current activity by the churches in the priority coalfield areas of Northumberland and Durham.
- To identify and disseminate existing local models of good practice, so as to learn lessons from their success.
- To promote church involvement in community regeneration in the former coalfield areas and to affirm the positive contribution of faith community members.
- To act as a capacity building exercise for both Dioceses.
- To help towards the development of coherent strategies, in church and secular agencies, for regeneration activity in the designated priority areas.

- To encourage and influence further ecumenical activity within the coalfield areas.

Valuing contributions at all levels and striving for an inclusive approach.

The principles informing the planning of the events and related activity were centred upon both inclusivity and learning from the experience of ordinary people, as well as those with strategic policy experience. The facilitators also wanted to encourage an open and constructively critical approach to elicit information about the realities facing the coalfield areas. The process adopted, therefore, involved both qualitative consultation with those in the church and local communities and the collection of some quantitative evidence about current practice and resources such as church buildings and premises.

Venues in former coalfield areas

The events were held in church premises in the heart of the former coalfields, at Ashington in Northumberland and Washington in (County Durham, as was).

Both events followed a similar format and structure:

- Keynote contributions providing the context and vision for the day.
- Theological perspectives on community regeneration.
- Case -studies and stories from successful projects.

- Task focussed discussion to explore propositions for action.

[The appendices provide summary notes on contributions of keynote speakers, workshops and case –studies]

Preface to findings and analysis of data collected

Before proceeding to discuss the findings from the workshops events and the questionnaire data it seems (given the agencies commissioning the review process) appropriate to include a section drawing out some theological perspectives on the theme of neighbourhood renewal and community regeneration.

Thinking about neighbourhood renewal and regeneration from a theological perspective.....

A characteristic distinguishing the church contribution to renewal in communities is the fact that it has a gospel vision of the 'just' community.

Much has been written about the ways in which Jesus challenged the unjust structures of society and there are many models available which seek to assist Christian groups to be challenging and constructive today. Theology should be implicit in regeneration activity, allowing the Gospel critique to be brought to bear.

To address the issue and question of ***why should Churches be involved in Regeneration*** the following offers a position statement and working proposition.

First, Christians are called at a deep level to be partners with God in bringing about God's purposes.

Church people cannot, therefore, avoid engagement with the world in which those purposes are being either furthered or denied. This carries the risk of being drawn into uncomfortable compromises, or of taking an unpopular stance.

Second, Christians believe absolutely that things need not always be as they are - that transformation, of individuals, communities and of society is always possible. Regeneration is a word that needs its religious origins to be reclaimed. At heart regeneration cannot be merely the renewal of bricks and mortar, but of individuals and communities and the economic life that sustains them.

Third, working in partnership assumes working with and learning from others. We should note the diversity this may involve, particularly if including work with other faith groups. In this is mirrored the kind of wholeness and community built on interdependence which is at the heart of God's nature and purposes.

The distinctive contribution the faith groups can bring to regeneration partnerships is the capacity to act and speak as the honest broker. At their best, faith groups tend to be less constrained than others who may have vested interests.

Fourth, working with others whose aims are shared [if not necessarily their religious beliefs] helps to sharpen Church peoples' understanding of God's presence in the World.

Thus, theology is a way of making sense of what is happening to individuals and communities. An

imperative of Christian understanding is to enable people to flourish, viewing them as an essential part of God's creation. The church is in the community and shares in its condition, whether it is thriving or suffering. One implication of this understanding is, therefore, that the church should be integrally involved in supporting regeneration from within communities that are 'on the edge', as is the case with many of the former coalfield neighbourhoods.

A critical reflection on recent social history suggests that "Regeneration" has been appropriated by politicians, so as to reflect their ideas of the changes needed to bring recovery to neighbourhoods that are in decline. During the 1980's the main thrust of regeneration was towards property development, whereas recent policy concerns have emphasised the need to tackle social exclusion and redress the disparity between poor neighbourhoods and the mainstream of national life.

In such tasks the church has the opportunity (and some may argue the obligation) to undertake a prophetic role drawing attention to the dire plight of others and the need to help heal the divisions and inequalities in society. Church people, through involvement in partnerships and networks can adopt ways of working that can give voice to the poor, challenge authority and help create a fairer society. Increasingly, government regeneration programmes are emphasising community development as a central theme to inform policy-making and service provision in disadvantaged communities and neighbourhoods.

These new strategies, perhaps for the first time, recognise the crucial role played by the faith communities in disadvantaged areas. It is interesting to note that a recent publication, "Challenging Communities – Church Related Community Development and Neighbourhood Renewal", asks:

- *How prepared is the church for the challenge?*
- *What does the church have to offer?*
- *How well is this understood and supported?*
- *How will different faith communities work with each other?*

These are questions that need to be addressed by the church working in regeneration areas and they should be related to the context of current central government policies and other regional initiatives.

The foregoing also illustrates the value and relevance of the concept of a 'journey of learning', and the importance of prioritising time and opportunity for critical reflection on ongoing work and development activity.

Key Findings – views from the workshops

Many church congregations and personnel are engaged in activities that contribute to the coherence and well-being of their communities. Examples of practice and interesting illustrations showed some pioneering initiatives and exciting work. Participants were able to draw attention to some gaps and barriers needing to be tackled. At another level, some required changes in policy and practice were identified which would strengthen and make more effective the contribution of people

and projects to coalfield regeneration in some areas

Faith Communities contribute to the revival of the coalfield communities.

It was noted that whilst all who participated in the workshop were Christian adherents there was little evidence that they regularly worked with other faith groups.

The outcome of the debate was to define eight broadly related strengths that Church involvement could offer. These are presented in no particular order of priority.

Specific attention was focussed on:

Outward Looking Vision

- Faith offers a vision for the enhancement of human flourishing under God
- Faith communities have the capacity to envision a different future
- That vision is not solely about material improvement, but engages with the nature of society and relationships
- Faith communities, by their nature, sustain and encourage networks and links across the world and bring an ethical and historical perspective
- Many churches have sponsoring relationships between different communities and nationalities, which enhance understanding and direct help to where it is needed.

Reflection and Meditation

- Faith generates a positive outlook of hope and a desire for progress
- It counteracts negativity, gives adherents the strength to persist in the face of difficulties and can inspire informed ethical action
- Prayer emphasises the quest for peace and spiritual awakening and practical concern for others.

Long-Term Commitment

- The churches have continuity in most communities, often as the longest-established institutions, and have been unwavering in their commitment and presence
- Many churches provide a focal point in the neighbourhood, at the hub of local life

- The churches offer stability within a rapidly changing environment
- The history, heritage and tradition of the churches gives a sense of identity to its members, and to localities associated with that history; Northumbria is particularly rich in this respect.

Local Knowledge

- The churches are an integral part of the community and should not be regarded as an outside agency
- Communities feel a sense of ownership of their local churches and they, in turn, bestow a sense of belonging
- Church congregations are a repository of local knowledge and understanding of the forces that shape a neighbourhood

Service to the Community

- Church-based organisations often provide services appropriate to local needs and fill the gaps left by other agencies
- Church communities can participate in and encourage service provision through co-operation in broader community initiatives
- Churches can help to build relationships within the community (and between other agencies) to improve the quality of service.

Valuing People

- Christian theology places great emphasis on the value of all people, especially the powerless and excluded
- The churches are inclusive in their mission
- Church communities align themselves with the suffering of others, and routinely provide outreach facilities

Empowering People

- The churches draw attention to social injustice and act as catalysts for change
- Members of the churches can become involved in issues, engage in the community, and draw support from the congregations to take action
- The churches affirm the sense of community
- Church members include significant “movers and shakers” on the political stage
- The churches have a prophetic task which involves challenging those who have greater wealth and/or power to act for the greater public good

Resourcing

- Members of the churches are a community resource and can offer a wide range of skills
- The churches are part of a wider network of regional and global interests which can bring focus upon areas of need
- The churches own buildings within almost all neighbourhoods, many of which already serve as community resources or could be developed to provide more facilities
- Churches have charitable status, and the remit to cover the widest range of charitable objectives

- There is management and investment experience amongst the wider church community that can be made available locally
- The churches are relatively independent of the influence of pressures such as power or wealth
- The churches are not solely driven by short-term funding requirements.

Policy issues and evaluating effectiveness

The workshops progressed to a consideration of the changes in policy and practice, which would contribute to a more sustainable development of the North East coalfield. Some of the responses

were predictable, but there were some creative contributions which have been used to inform the recommendations made later in this report.

The key emerging issues were:

The need for cultural change within the church and other organisations

- The need for the church to reflect critically on changes in society which may require some change in its ways of working
- Participants detected a resistance to change, because of fear of the unknown, lack of confidence, past failure and even fear of success, which should not be allowed to act as a barrier to initiative
- Coming to terms with profound changes in British society which have reduced adherence to the churches
- The importance of accepting risk and the possibility of loss (financial and otherwise) to allow innovation and creativity in community ventures

The need for a community development strategy

- There is a need to invest in education and training in community development within the churches and other organisations
- Community audits and development plans should be prepared for priority areas in both urban and rural contexts
- The network of advice and support available through the churches should be better developed and more accessible.

Develop opportunities for people from faith communities to engage in the community as encouraged by current Government strategy

- Amongst the faith communities, Christian believers in particular have a responsibility to engage fully in local organisations, offering their values, encouragement and leadership to help drive initiatives
- People from faith communities should challenge accepted practice and assumptions within the public sector where they disadvantage poor communities
- People from faith communities should accept the role of broker and enabler in making partnerships work effectively
- We should expect more of the lay membership of churches and faith communities, recognising their vocation to play a specific role, rather than expecting them to fit into ecclesiastical functions.

Funding Issues

- Public funding is often too prescriptive and inflexible and tends to drive the agendas of local organisations
- Much of the funding available to local projects is short term and output oriented, rather than leading to sustainable benefits
- Dealing with external funders is often made too complex for local communities and the fragmentation of funding sources adds to the burden
- The dominance of funding concerns leads to a survival mentality rather than organisations being led by vision

A fuller role for the churches in employment and business

- The churches should work beyond their familiar role in social welfare, to be involved in initiatives which generate or support worthwhile employment and other forms of economic regeneration
- The potential for heritage tourism in some parts of the former coalfields should be more fully explored and developed alongside the churches' outreach to visitors
- Transport and communication networks are recognised as contributing significantly to economic conditions. These require further investment to stimulate social inclusion, particularly in the more isolated parts of the coalfields such as West Durham

Help for “dying” communities

- Some villages/communities will not survive the economic changes that have beset them and need the sustained support of the churches
- Work is not the only important issue in the changing function of coalfield communities
- There are many individuals in these neighbourhoods who are not involved in paid work, but whose lives could also be fulfilling through alternative opportunities
- The churches have a mission to care for those who are left out

Resources and Action Plans

Participants in the workshop sessions were encouraged to make proposals to improve regeneration of the coalfields. Many of these

were directed at the church itself, but several have wider implications for public policy. The main suggestions are listed below:

- **Development of a regional community development strategy**, including education and training to help church communities play a bigger role in regeneration. Among the requirements were the capacity to conduct social audits, better skills for partnership working and the development of social entrepreneurship. Some felt that the church should appoint chaplains with a specific community mission and rotate them through needy towns and villages for a limited period. Others felt there

could well be staff available within local authorities or councils for voluntary service who could facilitate if properly engaged.

- **Tackling the fabric of some church buildings** to make them more suitable for secular community use. It was notable that a number of churches reported that they lacked basic amenities, such as internal toilets or kitchens. In addition, there was a desire to keep churches open to the public, although this posed insurance difficulties, particularly in tourist areas.
- **A number of recommendations related to the funding issue.** Some considered that the churches should collectively present their case to funders in support of their regeneration strategy and that an institution of the churches should act as the holding account for regional funds. On a practical level, local churches were seeking more help, advice and mentoring in the availability of regeneration funds, and how to access those resources. It was felt that there were skilled fundraisers within the churches who could share their knowledge and support others. There was also a view that funders ought to be better co-ordinated, for example, by devising a common application form. They should also pay more regard to sustaining initiatives rather than continually seeking innovation.
- **Communication and networking** was a further theme. A suggestion was made for an audit and the establishment of a skills bank within the region. This would encourage church members to make their talents more widely available. District fora were also proposed to bring together those interested in, for example, community development or economic initiatives. Underpinning these ideas was a proposal to develop a regional website to assist access to information and easier communication.
- **Churches' employment practices** also came under scrutiny. The churches need to be more aware of the sense of isolation felt by many in declining neighbourhoods. Greater continuity and hand-over periods when parish clergy changed post were proposed and job descriptions for church positions that reflect the nature of local engagement with projects, with a view to trying to ensure that the skills and experience of replacement clergy and other staff matched local needs. Engagement with the Local Strategic Partnership should be expected from some church representatives.
- **There was a call for each diocese to** review its resource strategy, to consider how it should best invest church funds in its staff, buildings, etc, and to find innovative ways of supporting the community. This should include some element of risk and risk management.

Findings from the Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire sought information on two issues: **(1) the level of resources for community engagement within each parish and (2) the range of activities which each parish undertook.**

- 1.1 A total of 56 questionnaires were received from the 131 parishes within the priority coalfield areas. This represents a response rate of 42.7%, which is regarded as above average for questionnaire surveys.
- 1.2 Of the 56 responses, 31 were from the Newcastle Diocese (Northumberland coalfield) and 25 from the Durham Diocese, which represents a significantly higher proportion of the parishes in Newcastle Diocese (77.5%) compared to Durham (27.5%).
- 1.3 Some caution is needed in interpreting the data gathered from the questionnaires. Where there are doubts about the intentions of respondents, these are described in relation to the relevant questions below.

Resources People

- 2.1 Details were requested on the number of paid staff and regular volunteers within each parish. In terms of staff, the predominant finding was that parishes had between one and three paid members of staff, usually the incumbent and perhaps a part-time curate and verger.
- 2.2 However, 9 (16%) parishes reported having no staff and, in one or two cases, it was clear that the vicar did not include him or herself in the tally! In some cases one member of clergy covered several small parishes, each with its own church and congregation.
- 2.3 Only four (7%) parishes reported having 4 or more paid employees.

- 2.4 The question regarding volunteers was more difficult to interpret. It is clear that most parishes have a core of active members of the congregation who undertake a range of worthwhile activities in their own time.
- 2.5 Most parishes (76%) reported having more than 4 people in that category, with the average being between eight and fifteen.
- 2.6 However, some respondents listed the whole congregation, and twelve (21%) reported having more than 15 volunteers.
- 2.7 There were comments from some clergy that, although they had several dedicated volunteers who engaged in very valuable work, their average age was over 80, so they were unlikely to be able to sustain that level of activity.

Premises

- 3.1 The majority of churches (71%) reported having between one and three meeting rooms available for community use.
- 3.2 However, five (9%) parishes reported having no meeting space, and eight (14%) owned more than four rooms. More than half of the parishes (52%) also used other local premises for their activities.
- 3.3 Most reported using community centres or village halls, while some used other denomination's premises, local authority buildings, schools and, occasionally, pubs.

Facilities

- 4.1 We were interested to discover the type of facilities, which parishes offered for community use.
- 4.2 35 (62.5%) out of the 56 could offer catering facilities (in one or two cases these were described as "limited"); 21 (37.5%) had play equipment, and 20 (35%) offered open space (in some instances this was the churchyard).

- 4.3 Smaller numbers (12) (21%) had entertainment equipment and only 6 (10%) had computers available for use.
- 4.4 One or two mentioned other amenities that the church offered, such as car parking, tables and chairs, and a Garden of Rest.
- 5.7 Two parishes specifically reported ministry provision of chaplains to the R.A.F.,
- 5.8 Others mentioned use of the church as a polling station and for councillors to hold ward surgeries.
- 5.9 Far fewer parishes engaged in activities which could be described as having an economic development aspect. Five (9%) offered welfare advice and information, 4 (7%) were engaged in training programmes, and three (5%) in credit unions. None were currently involved in community enterprise, although 3 reported that they were in the planning stages.

Activities

Local Initiatives

- 5.1 Respondents were invited to list all of the local initiatives which they engaged in, or were planning in the near future.
- 5.2 The majority (35) (62.5%) undertook religious education and 7 (12.5%) were intending to (probably principally in schools), while almost as many (34) (60%) undertook community events and 3 (5%) were planning to.
- 5.3 Half or more of the parishes offered social, recreational or welfare activities, including pensioners activities (27) ((48%), leisure and recreation (25) (45%), toddler or playgroups (22) (39%) and youth work (19) ((34%). 9 (16%) were planning to develop youth work provision, a significant number compared to other activities.
- 5.4 8 parishes (14%) operated a drop-in café (in some cases this was simply a weekly coffee morning or afternoon), while 6 (10%) were planning to do so.
- 5.5 12 parishes (21%) listed other initiatives that they were undertaking. These fell generally into the category of welfare support, and included family support, a homeless project, luncheon club, asylum seekers project, bereavement support, disability support, a healthy living project and an immediate needs store.
- 5.6 Two parishes specifically reported ministry to tourists and pilgrims,

Partnership Working

- 6.1 The majority of parishes reported that they worked with other local churches (40) (71%), often through the Churches Together framework. 22 (39%) reported that they worked with local community organisations,
- 6.2 13 (23%) with one or more charities, and 10 (18%) with their local regeneration partnership, several with local schools and one with a Sure Start Partnership.
- 6.3 Only one reported working with a different faith community.

Additional Resources

- 7.1 Relatively few parishes received any funding other than from church resources, or their own fundraising. 34 (60%) received no external funding. Nine (16%) reported receiving funds from charitable trusts, four (7%) had received lottery funding (usually Heritage Lottery Funds to restore the fabric of a historic church), two (3.5%) had received Single Regeneration Budget funds and one European Funding.
- 7.2 Only three (5%) had received funding from the Church Urban Fund/ Coalfields Regeneration Trust.

- 7.3 One parish received funds from the local Health Trust and one from "Community Chest" (the source of that funding was not clear).
- 7.4 Of the churches which did raise funds from other sources, several were multiply funded.

Difference between the two Dioceses

- 8.1 As mentioned above, there was a much higher response rate from the Newcastle Diocese, and also a higher attendance level at the workshop session.
- 8.2 Whilst the circumstances of the two dioceses, as revealed by the questionnaires, were broadly similar, in some respects the responses were different.
- 8.3 Those responding from the Durham diocese tended to have larger establishments: 7 Newcastle parishes (22.5%) reported having no parish employees, compared to only 2 in Durham, and only 1 Newcastle parish reported having 4 or more staff, whereas 3 of the Durham parishes did.
- 8.4 There was also a slight tendency for Durham to report more volunteers.
- 8.5 In terms of public meeting rooms, none of the Newcastle parishes had 4 or more rooms, whereas 8 (32%) Durham parishes did.
- 8.6 In terms of facilities available for community use, Durham similarly reported a higher level of provision in all categories (as might be expected in view of the Durham parishes having more or larger premises). For example, 72% of Durham parishes had catering facilities, compared to only 52% of Newcastle parishes.

8.7 Other comparisons were as follows:

	Newcastle	Durham
Computers	7%	16%
Entertainment		
Equipment	7%	40%
Catering		
Facilities	52%	72%
Play		
Equipment	26%	52%
Open Space	32%	40%

- 8.8 There was also a slight tendency for the Durham parishes to make more use of buildings owned by others for their activities, although this difference was not significant.
- 8.9 Due to the lower response rate in Durham Diocese, it is a possibility that there was a bias towards the larger church establishments in the number of questionnaires returned, and that the smaller parishes were less well represented.
- 8.10 In most categories of activity, there was also a slight tendency for Durham parishes to undertake more community functions, except in the fields of religious education and drop-in cafes, where Newcastle Diocese seemed to be more active.
- 8.11 Both dioceses had a high level of engagement with other local denominations (64% Newcastle and 80% Durham), although only one of the Newcastle parishes reported working jointly with another faith.
- 8.12 Both dioceses tended to work equally with community organisations, residents groups or parish councils (39% and 40%), while Durham had greater involvement with local regeneration partnerships (28% compared to 10% in Newcastle).
- 8.13 77% of Newcastle parishes and 72% of Durham parishes received no external funding and there were no significant differences in the types or amounts of access to alternative funds.

Conclusions

- **The church is present and active in even the smallest former coalfield communities**
- **Church buildings and staff are of significant importance in meeting community needs**
- **Church-initiated activities also take place in a range of other community settings**
- **Most churches provide catering facilities, although other amenities are more sparse**
- **A small number of churches are not usable for public events because they lack basic amenities**
- **The church retains a key role in meeting the spiritual and social needs of local communities**
- **Alongside the traditional social welfare and recreational groups which depend on church resources (uniformed youth groups, over-60's, bridge clubs, etc), the church provides a range of innovative forms of support, such as help for the homeless, asylum seekers, and on health-related issues.**
- **There are indications that youth work and more informal community work are growth areas for church initiatives**
- **Only a minority of churches are involved in any form of community economic development**
- **Most churches are involved in partnership with both community organisations and other Christian denominations, but only a few have a relationship with a formal regeneration partnership**
- **There is a lack of communion with other faiths, even in areas where they are well represented**
- **Local churches have achieved only limited access to external funding.**

Priorities for the Churches

The former coalfields review events and research uncovered a variety of roles that the churches and faith groups play, both in carrying out their activities and in reaching out to their local communities. At best these have had a transforming effect. Priorities for sustained involvement are:

A Caring Role

Many of the region's churches are already deeply involved in caring for disadvantaged or needy members of their local communities, including the elderly, the isolated, and those in poor health. This role needs to be sustained and transformed by the new challenges faced by those communities, which now include the:

- long-term unemployed,
- disaffected young people
- families moving to new housing developments grafted onto old villages and towns,
- asylum seekers,
- those with drug dependency
- those recently released from prison.

Former coalfield communities no longer exhibit the cohesion that was so characteristic of earlier times when bound together by their common work experience. There are new issues and greater diversity – these call for the churches to be receptive and alert to emerging needs.

Social audits can be helpful in defining and framing new patterns of social need and in devising the most appropriate means and

agencies for addressing them. The audits can also be used to seek funds and resources both regionally and from further afield, eg. European funding.

Examples of outstanding collaboration between the churches and other community-based organisations were a characteristic of some of the case-study projects that were illustrated during the workshop sessions. Partnership between statutory agencies and the voluntary sector is a growing feature of service provision, which the churches need to assimilate into their practice.

A priority regarding skills development for church workers has been identified so that they may be effectively involved in partnership working. This is particularly so for the more complex and demanding partnerships engaged in strategic thinking and planning. As this report has stated earlier, people do value the faith communities' view and it does seem important that this is coherently and confidently conveyed.

Organisation

Local churches are longstanding organisations with skilled and able clergy and congregations. Churches are also linked to a wider network of support. Through their community connection, they have the potential to contribute substantially to community planning and development. Evidence gathered in the region shows that they often provide the

organisational framework for local initiatives.

Many former coalfield communities have seen a decline in the talent for organisation that was such a strong feature of trade unionism and other civic activities. The ability to plan and act collectively, to co-operate and share tasks, to keep records of decisions and pursue agreed agendas, needs to be maintained through local community organisations such as the churches.

Sense of Identity and Purpose

The church enjoys respect for having been around in most communities for a long time.

Both the continuity of the church and its outward vision make it a good vehicle to enhance a sense of identity to communities searching for a purpose after the loss of their major industry.

This is a challenging role to fulfil, against the diversity of community interests and decline in adherence to church institutional activities. Nevertheless, celebratory activities and social functions can help to reinforce social cohesion by providing opportunities for social contact. In neighbourhoods where there is a growing sense of risk and fear, these types of events can help to increase trust, community well-being and safety.

Churches can also play a constructive role in helping to recognise and nurture new opportunities, such as new employment, additional residential development or retailing, and integrate them with existing communities.

The Prophetic Role

Church groups aim for a transformative role based upon a practical theology. This is often expressed as a “bias to the poor”. In practice this means they should look for the root causes of community problems and search out ways to address the deeper issues. The expectation is that the churches will express views on social exclusion to those in authority, and offer leadership in the face of injustice – as viewed from a moral and ethical perspective. In some situations it may be appropriate for the churches and church people to resist policy trends and adopt a campaigning role in support of community interests.

To be effective, the churches need to be part of the consultative and decision-making mechanisms within localities. This will involve greater participation in community associations and parish councils, and also in Local Strategic Partnerships and other regeneration bodies.

The churches can help to bring new thinking or experience from other areas to bear on problems. This, it is suggested, may include new methods of investment towards providing better prospects for the disadvantaged, through mechanisms such as an employment bond.

An Economic Role

Faith communities can play a role, alongside others, in community economic development, ranging from playing host to agencies that provide help and support to those on low incomes, through to generating local employment initiatives. Faith communities, including churches, can support the economic role of the third sector, which forms a significant strand of the Regional Economic Strategy.

The churches already support industrial mission in the North East (Northumbria Industrial Mission and Tees Valley Ministry), which are already active in regeneration. The churches may be able to expand or adapt this resource to improve outreach into the unemployed community, (viz. Respond! in TVM on Teesside).

The churches also own capital resources in the form of land and buildings and in their existing investments, which could have value in economic development terms.

Some churches in “Northumbria” have a unique historical and architectural heritage that draws visitors and provides opportunities for income generation through tourism. Local heritage trails and activities can provide learning and employment opportunities.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

An aim of this consultation process has been to bring together different players engaged in action and decision-making so that they can address some of the challenges of coalfield regeneration. This report draws out lessons which can be

used by key stakeholders to develop coherent strategies. This should make a greater impact on the regeneration of former coalfield communities. Described below are some of the main recommendations for further action.

Resource Strategy for each Diocese

Each diocese should review its resource strategy, and in particular how it prioritises its human and physical assets for the benefit of former coalfield areas. Much as a result of the influence that “Faith in the City” has had on resource allocation, inner city areas have received priority in recent years. Whilst recognising that some urban communities still suffered significant levels of deprivation, participants felt that there had been a shift in the geography of social exclusion. They felt that the former coalfields and isolated rural and semi-rural communities were more deserving of help than current policies perhaps recognised. This is borne out by the most recent Indices of Deprivation, and the Neighbourhood Renewal Funds that (with some notable exceptions) have been allocated to some former coalfield areas in the North East on the basis of their high ranking in the “league table” of deprivation. Church resource priorities would appear not yet to have taken into account the emerging reality.

The resource strategy needs to take into account the most appropriate staffing and appointments system for former coalfield communities. In particular, it should recognise that the skills and experience required for some positions ought to reflect local priorities and the types of work that particular congregations wished to undertake. Individual job descriptions should be tailored to reflect the unique natures of some ministries. There should be a period of hand-over to new appointees to familiarise them with their role. In addition, specific vocations and talents of lay people should be recognised, and they should be encouraged to take on community responsibilities.

Finally, a strategy for utilisation of the church’s building resources should be developed to serve local communities. There is evidence that improvements can make church buildings more accessible and useful to the local community. Any new investment should represent added value to the local community compared to other available resources, and care should be taken to protect historic churches. Sharing of church and community buildings is already much in evidence, and the opportunities to rationalise could be realised in some more cases.

Community Development Strategy

There were clear indications that the church should consider a community development strategy. This would involve an assessment of the proper role of the church in community development, involving education in the need for community development, improved resourcing and a service provision role. Among the elements of the strategy would be:

- A dedicated resource to help develop skills in selected parishes
- Training in how to conduct community audits in order to establish local priorities
- Education in community development processes
- Recognition of the greater role that the churches can play in community economic development and education in the appropriate skills
- Use of the status and independence of the churches in a more strategic way to benefit communities.

Involvement in Regeneration Activity

The prophetic role of the church in providing vision and leadership within the local community could be better realised. This could be done by giving greater encouragement and support to local church activists to help them assume a stronger role in regeneration at a 'political' level, i.e. in the institutions responsible for guiding key policy choices, such as Local Strategic Partnerships. This should be an area where the interests of local volunteers and members of the church congregation could be mobilised.

Tackling funding barriers

Churches should take a central role, perhaps at regional level, in providing fundraising support and "financial" services. A suggestion was made that the Church Urban Fund could be administered regionally. There was also a proposal to establish regional capacity to assist Churches to fund local regeneration initiatives, and to establish a holding account for that purpose.

Churches can attract funding for social purposes, and could use their charitable status and objectives more effectively to do so. Among the types of support sought could be:

- More effective dissemination of information to parishes on how to formulate proposals, how to match them to funding sources and where to get help and advice that would help them gain access to external funding sources
- Training and support to deal with funders' reporting requirements
- Project management and risk management advice to help appraise and run projects efficiently.

Inter-faith Initiatives

There is a need to establish a regional framework for inter-faith relationships and co-operation. Whilst the infrastructure for inter-denominational work seemed to be working well in most areas, there appeared to be only an initial level of development of communication and co-operation between faith communities. Especially in areas where there are significant communities of other faiths, such as within the conurbations, the paucity of such structures is disappointing. Minority communities are even more likely to suffer the impact of decline, unemployment and poor services than those of the dominant culture and should realistically be part of the solution to those problems.

Sharing Skills and Establishing an ICT Strategy

A skills audit should be carried out in each diocese and area, and a skills bank could be established, such that denominations and local churches could call upon advice and expertise from different areas. It was apparent that there were many talents within the faith communities that would be of great value to other neighbourhoods. The case-study projects, in particular, demonstrated how much had been learnt through experience of setting up and running projects and the opportunity to pass on skills to others had a celebratory function.

Developing an ICT strategy would be helpful in achieving information sharing and networking. The lack of access to computers in church community spaces was notable. Providing such resources and ensuring access to a diocesan or regional website would make the dissemination of information, training and skills exchange much easier and would benefit both the churches and the communities they serve.

Initial Framework for Development of Action Plan

Short-term Initiatives

- Establish a mechanism for delivering advice on external funding to local churches, through both better links to existing agencies (e.g. Councils for Voluntary Service, ESFON, local authority funding officers) and dedicated officer support.
- Signpost funding opportunities, and hold a funding workshop.
- Establish a dedicated regional resource for fundraising and managing funding
- Create a handbook for conducting parish audits (similar to that used for the CRC/Faith in Community Project), and pilot it in selected areas, using dedicated community chaplains
- Use the Churches Regional Commission and Churches Community Work Alliance website to assist communication, training and skills exchange
- Ensure that churches and faith communities engage with Local Strategic Partnerships under the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

Medium Term Initiatives

- Prepare a community development strategy (including community economic development) for the region, involving all denominations, and, if possible, other faiths
- Develop and pilot a community development training programme for church workers
- Develop capacity in community development at all levels of the church
- Disseminate good practice from successful projects on a continuous basis, including annual reviews and evaluations
- Explore the potential of a secondment system for clergy to enable them to spend time in alternative sectors and to develop new skills
- Develop a consultative framework to support faith community involvement with local authorities, Local Strategic Partnerships and regional bodies
- Establish and service a regional skills register
- Research the potential for economic development based on ecclesiastical tourism in Northumbria
- Establish an inter-faith consultative framework for community development
- Develop a strategy for encouraging church participation on regeneration policy bodies, including support mechanisms for those who are involved and for the Archdeacons and others who have a community partnership remit
- Introduce a recruitment and handover system for church appointments that is tailored to the needs of specific communities
- Promote the value of specifically secular engagement in community development and community work
- De-mystify community economic development and social entrepreneurship and promote the involvement of faith communities.

Speakers at 12 October Workshop, Ashington

Each speaker emphasised the value of bottom-up approaches to regeneration and the value of investment in the community sector to do things that governments don't understand.

Stephen Hughes, MEP

Stephen noted the profound changes that had happened to the area as a result of mine closures:

- The economy of coal production underpinned the way of life
- Rebuilding the economy was only possible after the pits closed
- Entire sectors of the economy had been in decline at the same time
- Some of those replacement industries had themselves collapsed and disappeared.
- Economic change brought about migration from the region to areas where the employment situation was more positive. The demographic changes indicate the North East has an ageing population.
- Poor educational attainment, limited aspiration and low self-esteem need to be tackled, as well as chronic ill-health.

How do we help individuals, families and communities to manage these changes and take advantage of them?

- A sense of solidarity, teamwork and commitment to the common good has not yet been lost
- Geographical isolation is less important since the emergence of new technology and communications.
- Faith communities are the modern equivalent of the extended family, a type of glue that prevents communities fragmenting as a result of change.
- The Third Sector, or social economy, can help to fill the many gaps in services to families.

Stephen drew attention to the achievements at Grange Villa, Durham, where a village co-operative had been set up, and now provided workshop units for small businesses and community enterprises, and a housing management co-op, which had bought up and renovated abandoned housing. He believed faith communities could stimulate and support such initiatives.

Stephen Downs, Government Office North East

Stephen Downs has responsibility for rapidly developing relationships between GO North East and the community and voluntary sectors.

The voluntary and community sector accounts for 10% of Gross Domestic Product, although in the North East the level is only 31/2%.

Research by the Social Exclusion Unit revealed that top-down approaches to regeneration often fail, because they are inappropriate to local situations.

There was a growing understanding that working Credit Unions, Development Trusts, etc. takes longer to produce results and risks have to be taken.

Stephen mentioned a range of new government funds, managed through GONE, where voluntary and community input, including by faith communities, was expected:

- The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, designed to ensure that the poorest communities were no longer the worst served, was under the control of Local Strategic Partnerships, where the voluntary and community sectors would have a say
- The Community Empowerment Fund was intended to give easy access to small sums to aid participation.
- Stephen also mentioned the role of neighbourhood management, where pathfinders were being established to test out good practice in improving services within deprived localities.

Ven. Bob Langley

Bob Langley provided the theological perspective on the day. The remit of theology was

- To make sense of what's happening to us
- To encourage human flourishing

The whole of creation is God's arena. If any suffer, it affects us all. Where people are forced to the margins by increasing change, as in the case of the former coalfields, we must strive to return to a proper balance. The Christian involvement with the disadvantaged and marginalized also highlights the repressive structures that underlie their condition.

Where human potential is being wasted, we strive to restore a set of right relationships, including worthwhile work, sharing in creativity and the renewal of civic and economic society.

Church people have an obligation to help in the healing process, to challenge developers on the health of the environment and to encourage human interaction and networks.

As church people we are called to be partners in the renewal process. Others also see us in that role, and we need to work with them. We are part of the local networks, we have resources and we can help communities to manage change.

Speakers at 19 October Workshop, Washington

Paul Cuskin, Employment Service

Paul described the scope of the Employment Service Northern Region. Structural changes were taking place to enable the merger of Employment Service with the Benefits Agency to create 'Job Centre Plus'.

Regionally, 5.3% were registered unemployed, and in July there were 250,000 vacancies. An estimated 4 million people of working age were on benefit, and, with the tightening of the employment market, employers were keen to encourage greater participation. Employment levels were now rising in East Durham. A Tyne and Wear Employer Coalition had been established to influence firms to take on the disadvantaged, and provide initial support. Employment Service Access Teams had become more flexible in the support they provided.

New Deal had been effective in engaging national and regional employers in taking on long-term unemployed people, of whom 25,000 had found jobs in this region (and sustained them over 6 months).

Employment growth sectors in the North East included retail, construction, hospitality, transport, call centres, and health and care occupations. However, many vacancies were not attractive to job seekers due to low pay, shift-work and other factors.

Paul emphasised the desire of Employment Service to work in partnership to address disadvantage. He encouraged faith communities to participate, and offered the opportunity to join the Coalition.

Tom Warburton, One NorthEast (Regional Development Agency)

Tom described the role of One NorthEast, one of eight Regional Development Agencies set up in 1999 to encourage sustainable economic development.

The role of ONE encompassed giving a leadership focus, championing the region nationally and internationally, increasing effective regional networks, ensuring that government initiatives were delivered in the North East, making the best use of development funding in the region, and attracting inward investment.

ONE co-ordinated the Regional Economic Strategy, comprised of six strategic objectives. These were delivered through Sub-Regional Partnerships and regional activity. The objective was to fund and manage regeneration consistently through both special funding for deprived areas (Neighbourhood Renewal Fund) and from mainstream sources.

The main resources available to ONE consisted of £160 million a year for regeneration, £430 million over six years from European Objective 2, £200 million over six years from European Objective 3, and £14 million a year from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

Tom made it clear that ONE supported community-based regeneration and social entrepreneurship, and appreciated the important role that faith groups could play.

Ven. Frank White, Archdeacon of Sunderland

Frank White provided the theological perspective for the day.

Our aim is to seek paradise, the Garden of God in the world to come. Regeneration was originally a theological word meaning “re-originating”, which implies a new creation, rather than simply tinkering to improve what’s already there. Frank felt it was better to talk about new communities, defined by their future, rather than “former coalfields”.

The notion of paradise is one of social inclusion. Wealth distribution and social exclusion is constructed by policies, which have resulted in a divided society. The church is profoundly committed to the renaissance of the North East, through social justice and equality. Paradise is fundamentally egalitarian, although it may always be a vision on the horizon. If ONE is successful economically, but the region is still divided, the effort will have failed.

The short timescale of most regeneration initiatives is a concern. Going through an experience of profound change may take generations. Many jobs are now part-time, and many people have more than one job. Portfolio working can be positive, but it requires high skill and flexibility. The education system needs to keep pace so people can be equipped to work in a different way. Portfolio working, however, has the disadvantages of a lack of pension security and sickness pay.

Frank sees vision as the central issue. Many people still define themselves as living in a former mining village. How can we help to envision change in the way people think of themselves? Faith communities can offer that vision of transformation. Christians are called upon to contribute to regeneration through their vision of a local paradise.

Background and purpose of the organisation

Lynemouth Community Trust was established in December 1998 to facilitate the regeneration of Lynemouth, a former mining village situated in the Northumberland Rural Coalfield, which has suffered greatly from the decline in mining and is categorised as one of the most deprived villages in Northumberland. The Trust seeks to do this through providing or assisting in the provision of public amenities for the benefit of the inhabitants of the area. The Village Appraisal (commissioned by the Village Action Group, co-ordinated by Community Council and published May 1996) showed that the highest percentage of people leaving the village was either due to relocating because of employment or because of the lack of employment in the area. The Trust identified that the village needed to redefine its economic base to ensure its continuation into the future.

The Trust secured funding to purchase and refurbish a derelict hotel, situated within the village, to create a One Stop Shop. The aim of the Centre is to provide local residents with the services and facilities that will enable them to improve their own lives. The vision of Lynemouth Community Trust is to contribute, over a period of time, to the total regeneration of the village, which will result in lower unemployment and higher levels of skills and community involvement.

The Trust comprises ten Trustees who all represent a high level of commitment towards and/or involvement in local activities or industry. Currently it is a company limited by guarantee with memorandum and articles of association. However an application has been made to the Charities Commission to become a registered charity.

Eleven staff are employed within the Resource Centre; The Development Co-ordinator is responsible for the day-to-day running and development of the facility along with making funding applications to ensure the continuation of the centre. This post is full-time along with that of administrator and caretaker. Two cleaners work 19 hours between them each week. Two part-time persons are employed in the Community Café and these are paid through money generated by café sales. The Trust has recently secured funding to facilitate an environmental project which includes regenerating and conserving an area of wetland and deneland within the village. This has brought employment to a project manager and a supervisor. In addition nine waged opportunities through New Deal have been created and the posts will last for twelve months. This is an ILM and therefore the long-term aim is to transfer the participants into permanent employment.

The provision

The Centre provides training opportunities and employment guidance targeted towards young adults and unemployed people of the village. This is delivered through a series of partnerships: Employment Service, CRA Amble Ltd. (a local training provider) and Amble Development Trust who provide an outreach guidance worker. Further partnerships with local schools, college, training providers and WEA result in a wide range of both vocational and leisure course being delivered.

An Information Technology suite, part funded through CloC, provides computer and Internet access and is supported by a facilitator to assist users when no tutors are available. Currently five vocational courses per week are being delivered in the ICT suite. A further development is the establishment of a Learn Direct Centre. This consists of a wide range of vocational courses being offered 'on-line' so that residents who work shift patterns or need a flexible learning pattern, can still access learning opportunities.

A range of leisure courses, including keep fit, yoga and holistic therapies, have been in operation for approximately nine months and the centre is hoping to establish itself as a healthy living centre in the not too distant future. A community café has provided a training base for New Deal Candidates, volunteers and school work experience. The County Council Library Service has been located in the Centre. A variety of counselling, self-help and support services are available e.g. housing advice, benefits advice (CAB), drugs and substance abuse support, policy surgery, etc. It provides a venue for local meetings and action groups and facilities for both private and commercial hire. A youth club and teen bar operates three nights each week and juvenile crime has declined somewhat since the commencement of activities. Further partnerships with Education Service and Social Services have resulted in the provision of a work base for Home Tutors and pupils who are not able to attend school and adults with basic literacy and numeracy needs. A homework club will be provided in partnership with the local high school and this should commence in October.

The Racecourse Community Access Point, Houghton le Spring, Co Durham

Background and Purpose

Research carried out by Crime Concern in 1994 established issues of concern within the former coalfield community. These included not only the high level of crime, but high unemployment, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse. The village had poor access to services such as transport, information and childcare. A steering group of local people was set up, with support from councillors and officers, and funding for two development workers was obtained from RECHAR. The steering group trained to become a Board of Directors, and successfully applied to the Lottery Board for £185,000. Help from the council has resulted in a building being made available.

The project aims to empower local people to manage their own provision; to break down barriers to access; to support training and education leading to employment; to listen and respond to community needs so that the whole community can participate.

Operation

The Access Point provides a community-led training programme consisting of a wide variety of relevant courses run by local people who have gained appropriate qualifications; an ICT community access point; job search facilities; a local newsletter; and a homework club. The Board of Directors provides continuous training to its members to enable them to understand the requirements of their roles and to develop policy. There have been numerous spin-offs, such as the establishment of a befrienders group funded through the Health Action Zone; participation in a local coalfield partnership; community arts initiatives; a support network for new families (especially asylum seekers); a reading group; and local agenda 21 consultation. All households are kept informed about what is happening at the access point, and of other local opportunities.

Plans have been drawn up for an extension to the building, and the organisation has applied for charitable status. Monitoring and evaluation is carried out on a regular basis.

Problems Encountered

- It has been time-consuming and complicated to obtain charitable status.
- The building is now too small for all the training activity
- Some projects have run out of funding, which is a constant struggle
- Expectations have been raised, and the project can't fulfil them all at once
- There was no preparation for the arrival of new families (refugees)
- Pressure on the administration has led to local people learning new skills
- Larger crèche facilities are needed
- Dealing with the different monitoring demands of funders distracts staff from the real work

Achievements

To date, 483 people have attended formal training, and 353 have obtained certificates. 27 young people and 25 over-25s have gained employment. Perhaps the greatest achievement has been the level of community participation, including the involvement of young people. The project has 25 local volunteers.

Networking is a key feature of the project, which has positive links with the local council, the police, charities, education services, health promotion, employment service.

Direct funding for the project has been obtained from the Single Regeneration Budget, European Social Fund, and European Regional Development Fund.

Future Plans

The project has expansion plans, both for the building and for its services. It is hoping to open 7 days per week, to acquire its own community transport, to set up youth work, and to help more people to progress into advanced education and employment. It needs more resources to do all these things, including staff, equipment, an outdoor play area and more tutors, all of which requires more funding.

Shilbottle Skills Centre History of the Project

The Centre Group was originally formed to examine the conclusions of a study conducted by Leeds University in 1993, (Shilbottle Village Study. A Report for the Northumberland Task Force, December 1993). This report concluded that Shilbottle needed a focal point where help could be offered to the unemployed, the young people of the village and all those who felt isolated in the community.

The search for a suitable site and funds to convert a building into a skills centre where education, guidance and less formal activities could be offered was long and arduous. The breakthrough came in January 1999 when members of the Skills Working Men's Club offered the Group a derelict wing of the club. By the end of the year all the funds were in place to turn the dream into reality.

Work began in January 2000 and with help from our funders, for which we are extremely grateful, the Centre became operational in June 2000. The first courses were offered during the summer holidays and our "trailblazing" project has gone from strength to strength. The Skills Centre success has shown that a resource owned and run by the community can be achieved with hard work and determination. It is a credit to all those individuals and organisations who have played a part in realising a dream. The Centre is the first step in the regeneration of Shilbottle and offers possibilities of long term sustainability well into the 21st century.

Background and Purpose

In 1994 South Tyneside Churches Together established a charity to help the unemployed in the borough, and received initial funding for three years from the Henry Smith Foundation. The role of a community chaplain in its formation was critical.

The underlying values of the organisation guide all its work. They are: equality of opportunity; a genuine desire to help; community involvement; staff and management commitment

Operation

TEN as a main office and 12 outreach centres, many based in local churches. It provides jobsearch advice from the first day that a person becomes unemployed. It also administers a range of grants, including Into Work Grants (for equipment and services to enable someone to take up a job offer), Ready for Work Grants (up to £200 to help someone become more employable). Ten also offers informal learning opportunities, mainly helping to improve interview skills, familiarise with ICT, prepare curriculum vitae, etc. In many other districts, this type of work is carried out by the local authority. TEN sees over 2000 clients each year, and places 500 into work.

Governance

TEN works closely with the job centres, local authority, churches and community centres, where most of the outreach is based. These organisations are all represented on the management committee. TEN also attracts volunteers, and has an Unemployed Forum of 20-25 people who advise on service, and are represented on the management committee.

Challenges

S. Tyneside has the highest unemployment in the North East and among the highest in the country. 12 of its 20 wards are among the most deprived in Britain. There is a mismatch of skills to current employment demand, exaggerated by a parochial culture, where people are unwilling to consider some types of work or to travel outside their neighbourhood. There is limited scope within South Tyneside for inward investment – indeed the borough has never had enough work for all its residents and must look outside its boundaries.

Funding

The agency is mainly funded through Single Regeneration Budget and European Social Fund Objective 3. It has received some charitable funding, particularly from Northern Rock Foundation. The service costs roughly £320,000 per annum, consisting of £230,00 running costs, and £90,000 in grant aid. The unit cost is £650 per job, which compares favourable with most similar work, proving that voluntary organisations can be a cost-effective alternative.

Quality

TEN has introduced quality standards to provide the best possible service to clients, and to satisfy public funders. It has accreditation from the Guidance Accreditation Board, PQASSO and Investors in People. To ensure accountability, TEN carried out annual external evaluations, and provides monitoring information to clients, funders and partners.

The Future

TEN does not see the need for its services diminishing, and will continue to encourage wider aspirations. It needs to secure on-going funding, is seeking additional funding to offer more to 18 –25 year olds, and will look to having a Tyne and Wear dimension. TEN is working with other partners in creative ways, for example holding a family fun day at a leisure centre in tandem with a job fair.

TEN sees itself as a service, not a charity, and is a genuine example of a third sector provider.

Acknowledgements

The Churches' Regional Commission arranged these events and the production of this report with the assistance of consultant, Fiona Clarke, assisted by Jim Robertson, of the University of Northumbria, and with additional input from Pam Rudram.

Particular thanks are due to Crispian Probert, of the Church Urban Fund, for help in organising the workshops, and to staff of CRC, especially Sue Blackbird, Anna Slevin and Stuart Allan for their administrative assistance.

We are most grateful to the speakers at both events for their stimulating presentations. We would like to note the contributions of:

Stephen Hughes, MEP
Stephen Downes, Government Office North East
Vince Robinson, Employment Service
Paul Cuskin, Employment Service
Tom Warburton, One NorthEast:
The Venerable Bob Langley, Archdeacon of Lindisfarne
The Venerable Frank White, Archdeacon of Sunderland

We would like to thank all those who came to the events in,

Ashington:

David Beater, Janet Brearley, Bill Callaghan, Bill Carr, Brian Cowen, Sean Cunningham, Mike Dixon, Mike Elphick, Ian Falconer, Bert Grimshaw, Robin Harper, Alison Harrison, Pamela Lamb, Alistair MacNaughton, Anthony Magness, Marian Penfold, Jean Richardson, Sally Sample, Mark Savage, Roger Styring, Joyce Templey, Anne Wager-Bradley

Oxclose:

Jonathan Adams, Bernadette Askins, Andrew Bealing, Brenda Bell, David Boddy, Malcolm Cairns, Jeremy Chadd, John Claydon, Kevin Dunne, John Hancock, David Hunt, Robert Innes, Dennis Kerridge, John McManners, Michael Peers, Keith Woodhouse

Our sincere thanks are offered to those who made us welcome at the two venues, Trinity United Reform Church, Ashington, and Oxclose Church, Washington.

We are also grateful to the National Union of Mineworkers, Durham Area HQ and Durham County Council for the photographs used on the front cover.

Thanks are due to the Church Urban Fund for funding this work, through the Coalfield Small Grants Programme.

Fiona Clarke would like to record her gratitude to Ian Zass-Ogilvie, Director of CRC, for his unfailing encouragement and guidance in carrying out this assignment.

It is our hope that this report, and the events leading up to it, will provide some long-term benefits to the coalfield communities of Northumberland and Durham.